

## ILOCOS LAKBAYAN - 4

The third day was a foray to the south. We drove towards Paoay town on the side roads, and on the way, dropped by a house/shop which had a whole lot of woven items: blankets, table cloth, runners, etc.



While most of the ladies did their shopping (and they did take their time), we guys waited patiently outside at the yard and playground. A few others went across the road to the viewing shed which overlooked Paoay lake.



In all of these peregrinations, one feature that struck all of us was the cleanliness of the surroundings. There were no plastic wrappers or trashy droppings strewn on the roadside, and house fronts along the road were generally neat and well manicured. Also, when there were modern houses that obviously were funded from outside sources, the color schemes were really loud. Photo on left wasn't that bad yet when compared to others with violet or green or red colors. This prompted me to recall my rusty Ilocano and the terms such as "strambotico ka leglegleg" for bright gaudiness and "kerkermet" for the frugal/fastidious/hard-working aspect of the Ilocano psyche. Only Jessie and I had Ilocano backgrounds amongst the group, and I particularly found myself talking to the local folk in their language.



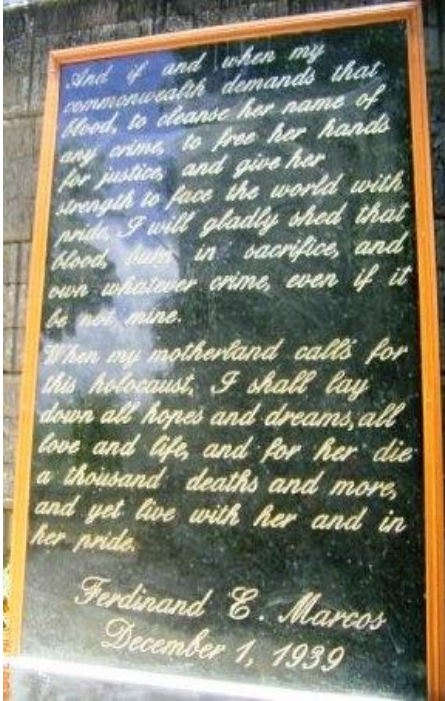
Mine must have been really bad Ilocano, as most of these young folks answered in Tagalog. For those who chatted back in Ilocano, I suddenly found myself stumped.

A short drive further south brought us to the Paoay town, and the looming church and steeple. We were done of our sightseeing in less than half an hour. Mercy said our next stop was Malacanang of the North, and as she led the way in lead car, I realized we were doubling back north to the lakeshore. A misstep, I thought to myself. From the weaver's shop, we should have first gone to Malacanang, then to the Paoay church, and then to the next on the itinerary, Marcos' body in Batac town, 4 km east of Paoay.



Above photos L to R: Paoay church with preserved façade and bell tower, cornerstones laid 1704 and 1793 respectively, now a World Heritage Site; the right side wall with buttresses was an excellent backdrop for numerous camera poses; the interior of the church with as-yet uncompleted ceiling.

The Malacanang Palace of the North was an obvious copy of the original, and there were crowds of people who paid the 20 peso entrance fee. Here, we had a self-timed shot at the stairs.



But while the camaraderie was vibrant and congenial beforehand, the mood suddenly changed as we got into Batac and parked at the Marcos museum. Romy and Edna adamantly refused to enter the mausoleum, and this was echoed also by Lisa. Romy said he probably would spit on it. That gave me an idea. I said I'd enter and I would do just that. Well, the room was dark and cold, with the aircons running full blast and martial music drowning out all other noise. (As an aside, we heard that some years back, the Marcoses hadn't paid the utility bills, so power was cutoff, and without the aircons, McCoy started melting - admittedly even for me, this sounded like a tall story - but coming to think of it, maybe it was waxen then, and now its plastic). But anyway, due to strategic barriers, one couldn't go near the elevated tomb of clear acrylic that clearly showed Marcos' body whose face looked so suspiciously plasticized. And of course, picture taking was prohibited. So, when I was near the exit, at a pillar, I pursed my lips and quietly and surreptitiously let fly a few dribbles. Once outside, I triumphantly told Romy, eureka I did it. Later on, I found out only me, Mimi, Jess and Jessie had gone in. It was a good thing it was free, otherwise, I don't think it would have been worth even 2 cents.

The BS-ness of the plaque above only added to the negative aura.

The schedule called for lunch here in Batac, but with the pervasive bad vibes (even the drivers were pissed at the arrogance of the parking guards), we decided not to give any business to Batac, and opted to move on. We already had seen that the church was a modernized structure; not worth stopping for.

We settled at a restaurant just south of San Nicolas and ordered up a whole lot of native food. After almost an hour, there was nothing yet. Jimmy rebelled and was all set to walk out, but after a quick checkup at the kitchen and with some reordering (turns out they only had one cook), the food soon came out and it was excellent. With our gustatory needs thus placated, we drove on to Dingras. Mercy's grand aunt had



married a Puruganan, whose forefathers had built this huge house, now deeded to the town. It indeed was an impressive house, 200 years old with lots of memorabilia and artifacts, as shown on left. But even more dramatic was the shuttered, broken, ancient church of Dingras.



Then it was my turn to hearken to my forebears. At the outskirts of Laoag city was Camp Valentin S. Juan, inaugurated by then Gen Fidel Ramos in 1990, and I was one of the few descendants who missed the ceremonies. Capt Juan was a Constabulary officer killed in action in 1924 in Surigao, ambushed by some dangerous fanatics known then as Colorums. That's me and Lisa on the left photo, standing before the statue of the maternal grandfather whom I never knew.

From Laoag to Sarrat town was a mere 6 km eastward, and this was on Mercy's must-see list: the site where Imee Marcos was wed during their heyday, and the church and almost everything around it was redone over, reportedly pissing off the locals. We opted out, and went back to the hotel.

To be continued .....